

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-13 /095 W
-----170316Z 072778 /61/43

R 161224Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1912
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USLO PEKING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 3728

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (SUMMARY GARBLED)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: INDIAN ELECTIONS: POLLING BEGINS

REF: NEW DELHI 3589

SUMMARY: NO NEW MAJOR FACTORS HAVE ENTERED THE CAMPAIGN
SCENE AS BALLOTING BEGINS TODAY, ALTHOUGH MRS GANDHI HAS
SOUGHT MORE EXPLICITLY TO LINK THE CONDITIONS REQUIRING
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THE IMPOSITION OF THE EMERGENCY TO THE LIKELIHOOD THAT
AN OPPOSITION GOVERNMENT WOULD CREATE CHAOS AND INSTA-
BILITY. A MYSTERIOUS ALLEGED SHOOTING INCIDENT
INVOLVING SANHAY GANDI HAS STIRRED UP A LAST-MINUTE
FLURRY OF ACTIVITY; WHILE THE FACTS REMAIN MURKY, THE
OPPOSITION HAS CLAIMED THAT THE INCIDENT WAS A FRAUD
STAGE-MANAGED BY THE CONGRESS BOSSES. CHARGES OF

POLL RIGGING CONTINUE TO APPEAR, AND SCATTERED INSTANCES OF BALLOT BOX STUFFING COULD OCCUR, BUT THE GENERAL FEELING IS THAT MASSIVE RIGGING ON A SCALE SUFFICIENT TO INFLUENCE THE OVERALL OUTCOME IS UNLIKELY. ESTIMATES ON THE FINAL RESULT HAVE REMAINED FAIRLY CONSTANT, WITH MOST OBSERVERS PREDICTING A SLENDER MARGIN WHOEVER WINS A MAJORITY. THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS COULD BE HIGHLY FLUID AND WE CANNOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ELECTORAL FRAUD ALLEGATIONS BEING RAISED. NOR CAN WE RULE OUT DEMONSTRATIONS ANALOGOUS TO RECENT EVENTS IN PAKISTAN. END SUMMARY.

1. SINCE REFTTEL, NO MAJOR NEW FACTORS HAVE ENTERED THE CAMPAIGN SCENE. MRS GANDHI HAS CONTINUED HER HECTIC TOURING (MOSTLY IN THE NORTH) AND APPARENTLY INTENDS TO KEEP UP THE PACE TO THE LAST PERMISSIBLE DATE (MARCH 18 IN SELECTED PARTS OF UP AND BIHAR). BY THE TIME SHE FINISHES, THE PM WILL HAVE SPOKEN IN SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF OF THE CONSTITUENCIES WHICH CONGRESS IS CONTESTING. WHILE THE PRESS HAS CONTINUED TO PROVIDE BROAD AND BALANCED COVERAGE OF THE CAMPAIGN, ALL INDIA RADIO NEWS IN THE LAST WEEK HAS BEEN ALMOST TOTALLY DEVOTED TO THE RULING PARTY. THE THEMES AND RHETORIC HAVE REMAINED CONSTANT, ALTHOUGH THE PM MORE EXPLICITLY THAN BEFORE HAS SOUGHT TO LINK THE CONDITIONS REQUIRING THE IMPOSITION OF THE EMERGENCY TO THE LIKELIHOOD THAT AN OPPOSITION GOVERNMENT WOULD CREATE INSTABILITY AND CHAOS: IN A TELEVISED INTERVIEW WITH BBC (BROADCAST MARCH 14 IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE UK), AND IN RESPONSE TO A DIRECT QUESTION, SHE REFUSED TO RULE OUT A REIMPOSITION OF HARSH EMERGENCY MEASURES, SAYING THAT THE QUESTION WAS "VERY DIFFICULT TO ANSWER." SHE SAID THERE HAD TO BE A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR BEHAVIOR IN AND OUT OF PARLIAMENT AND UNITY AND STABILITY CULD NOT BE THREATENED. GETTING TOGETHER OF THE OPPOSITION WAS "CAUSE FOR CONCERN AND INSTABILITY." THE PM REJECTED ANY SUGGESTION THAT SHE HAD MISUSED THE EMERGENCY.

2. AN ALLEGED SHOOTING INCIDENT INVOLVING SANJAY GANDHI CREATED A LAST-MINUTE FLURRY OF ACTIVITY IN THE CAMPAIGN. ACCORDING TO NEWS ACCOUNTS A BAND OF "MISCREANTS" FIRED SHOTS INTO THE JEEP IN WHICH SANJAY WAS RIDING NEAR AMETHI ON THE NIGHT OF MARCH 14. NO ONE WAS HIT, ALTHOUGH LOCAL OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT A BULLET WAS FOUND IN THE SEAT NEAR WHERE SANJAY WAS SITTING. THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE CONCLUDED THAT SANJAY HAD HAD A "NARROW AND MIRACULOUS ESCAPE." CONGRESS LEADERS QUICKLY CONDEMNED THE ALLEGED ATTACK, WHILE A JANATA

SPOKESMAN DESCRIBED IT AS AN UGLY GIMMICK, A STAGE-MANAGED FABRICATION" DESIGNED TO DIVERT THE ATTENTION OF THE VOTERS. LATER REPORTS FROM THE SCENE ARE CONTRADICTIONARY AND MURKY, AND MOST DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS IN DELHI REGARD THE INCIDENT WITH GREAT SKEPTICISM. OTHERWISE, THE CAMPAIGN HAS ENDED WITH SURPRISINGLY LITTLE VIOLENCE.

3. SOME OPPOSITION LEADERS CLAIM TO HAVE UNCOVERED ATTEMPTS AT MASSIVE RIGGING IN THE POLL. CFD AND CPM LEADERS ON MARCH 14 CHARGED THAT DUPLICATE BALLOTS HAD BEEN DISCOVERED IN EVERY CONSTITUENCY IN WEST BENGAL, UP TO 20,000 PER CONSTITUENCY. CPM LEADER NANBOODIRIPAD REPORTED THE ALLEGED THEFT OF 20 REAMS OF PAPER WHICH WERE TO BE USED FOR THE PRINTING OF BALLOTS. CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER SWAMINATHAN CONCEDED THAT SOME BALLOTS MAY HAVE BEEN DUPLICATED BY MISTAKE, THAT HIS

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COMMISSION WAS INVESTIGATING THE MATTER AND THAT PARTY LEADERS WHOULD NOT EXAGGERATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AFFAIR. OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS, HOWEVER, INCLUDING MORARJI DESAI AND ASHOKA MEHTA HAVE RULED OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF RIGGING THE ELECTIONS. EMBASSY STRONGLY DOUBTS IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO RIG ENOUGH POLLING STATIONS TO SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCE THE FINAL OUTCOME AND VIRTUALLY ALL OTHER DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS HERE AGREE. NONETHELESS, JANATA SOURCES IN WEST BENGAL REGARD THE INCIDENT OF THE DUPLICATE BALLOTS AS A SERIOUS THREAT AND FEAR THAT THE OPPOSITION MAY BE ROBBED OF VICOTRY IN MANY CONSTITUENCIES IN THE STATE BY BALLOT BOX STUFFING.

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

4. ESTIMATES ON THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME HAVE VARIED LITTLE IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS, WITH THE BRITISH, FRENCH, SOVIET, AND JAPANESE MISSIONS THIS WEEK PREDICTING THAT CONGRESS AND ITS ALLIES WILL WIN 270-290 SEATS. EVERYONE CONCEDES, HOWEVER, THAT THE POTENTIAL SPREAD COULD BE FAR GREATER ON EITHER SIDE OF THIS MARGIN; THE BRITISH, FOR EXAMPLE, SPECULATE THAT CONGRESS AND ALLIES COULD WIN AS FEW AS 220 OR AS MANY AS 340. FOR WHAT IT MIGHT BE WORTH, WE HAVE HEARD FROM AN MEA SOURCE THAT TWO "USUALLY RELIABLE" ASTROLOGERS HAVE SEPARATELY PREDICTED THAT CONGRESS WILL WIN 309 OR 310 SEATS.
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IN AN INTERNAL SOVEMB POLL, SOVPOLCOUNS OPTED FOR 287 SEATS FOR CONGRESS ON BASIS THAT VODKA WAS RUBLES 2.87 A BOTTLE IN MOSCOW. HE THOUGH THAT AS RELIABLE A BASIS FOR ESTIMATE AS ANY*

5. NOW THAT POLLING HAS BEGUN, ATTENTION HAS FOCUSED ON POSSIBLE SCENARIOS AFTER THE RESULTS ARE ANNOUNCED. SINCE MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE FINAL LINE-UP IN THE LOK SABHA WILL BE CLOSE, INTENSE POLITICAL ACTIVITY WILL PROBABLY DOMINATE THE SCENE BETWEEN MARCH 22 AND 25, WHEN THE NEW HOUSE IS LIKELY TO CONVENE. AS WE POINTED OUT IN NEW DELHI 2838 (LIMDIS, NOTAL), POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS COULD SHIFT RAPIDLY AND THE PROSPECTS FOR FORMING A STABLE MAJORITY BY AN LEADER COULD BE SLENDER. IN SUCH AN EVENT, WE CANNOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTORAL IMPROPRIETIES AND DEMANDS FOR RECOUNTS, THUS PRODUCING PROLONGED UNCERTAINTY AS TO THE ACTUAL SEAT

COUNT FOR EACH PARTY. SIMILARLY, THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT AFTER THE RESULTS ARE ANNOUNCED DEMONSTRATIONS AND VIOLENT DISORDERS COULD BREAK OUT IN CERTAIN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. IN THIS SENSE, WE CANNOT RULE OUT DEVELOPMENTS ANALOGOUS TO THOSE IN PAKISTAN FOLLOWING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS.

6. WE PLAN TO SUBMIT AN INITIAL EVALUATION OF THE POLLING ATMOSPHERE IN DELHI, BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA ON MARCH 17 OR 18. (MADRAS VOTES ONLY ON MARCH 19.)
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Message Attributes

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